

how to plant your bulbs

SPRING 2019



sarahraven.com

The bulbs, corms and tubers you receive from us should reach you in best condition and be of top quality. We have worked with our suppliers for many years to guarantee this. I know how annoying it is if you plant something and wait eagerly for it to flower, only to find that it's the wrong colour or form. The bulbs you'll get from us will be largest size possible, first class and healthy to ensure the best and tallest flowers.

I love every one of these flowers in my garden, and I hope you enjoy growing them in yours.

Sarah

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Acidanthera murielae (syn. Gladiolus murielae) AGM

Height: 1m (39in)

Acidanthera murielae look fantastic in a late summer-autumn border and even better in a container. They are superb cut flowers. They have a cinnamon, spicy scent, particularly when it's warm, and pure white flowers with a crimson cross splotch at their heart. This elegant, towering bulb is a cousin of the gladiolus, but they flower and look good for twice as long. I had pots of them going for 10 weeks in the garden last summer. They start to bloom at the base of the flowering section of stem and as that individual flower goes over, the next one up the stem opens.



Planting in the garden The corms should be planted from mid spring to early summer, 10-15cm (4-6in) apart, at a depth of 10-15cm (4-6in). If your soil is not free-draining, add sharp sand or grit under the bulbs and add more to the soil all around.

In pots and containers You'll need a pot at least 35cm (14in) wide and 40cm (16in) deep. Use a loam-based compost with extra grit added, $\frac{2}{3}$ compost, $\frac{1}{3}$ grit. Potted, they also make fabulous autumn houseplants.

Care and maintenance Acidanthera's exotic origins (they come from Ethiopia) mean that they won't start to grow until summer has really arrived, so don't give up on them. As soon as the flower spikes appear, apply a high potash feed such as comfrey pellets (see our website) every two weeks. Continue until at least three weeks after flowering. This makes all the difference on poor soils, as flowering can diminish in successive seasons. See our website for comfrey pellets and fertilisers.

Acidanthera are not reliably hardy. If mulched deeply, they sometimes survive the winter in my garden, but it is best to lift them. This should be done when the leaves turn yellow/brown; snap the corms from the stems, dust with copper mixture, dry for two weeks then snap the new corms (there should be lots) from the old and discard the old corms. They must then be stored cold (but frost free) and dry until replanting. I store mine in a frost-free barn, hanging in a net or onion bag to guarantee good air circulation.

Anemone coronaria

Height: 30-40cm (12-16in)

Planting in the garden These need to be protected from frosts and should therefore be planted out in the garden when the danger of frosts has passed. Plant in full sun and in well-drained soil (add grit on heavy soils). These are strange looking corms that resemble a bit of dried dirt. Soak them in a bucket of water overnight and they will double in size and start growing more quickly than if planted dry. Plant them on their longest side, about 7-8cm (3½in) deep and 10-15cm (4-6in) apart. They are said not to be properly hardy, but I've seen them emerging through snow in the Omalus plateau in Crete in spring. The key thing is good drainage.

In pots and containers Excellent in pots for inside and good in pots or beds in a cool greenhouse or conservatory, planted as above. Also good for forcing in the autumn, where they should flower by mid February.

Care and maintenance Keep dry during dormant period. Lift and dry every two years, then replant.



Bessera elegans

Height: 60cm (24in)

Planting in the garden Plant after the risk of frosts as they are tender bulbs, 6cm (2½in) deep, 10cm (4in) apart as soon as the soil has warmed up a bit, in mid to late April or early May in well-drained soil in a full sun position.

In pots and containers Plant 6cm deep approximately 7-10 corms per 30cm (12in) pot in a well-drained compost.

Care and maintenance Lift when foliage dies back & discard old corms. Store new corms in a dry frost-free place. In milder areas, leave in ground with a thick dry winter mulch.



Convallaria majalis

Height: 20cm (8in)

These delicate, scented native wild flowers will thrive in dry or damp shade. They'll live there happily forever and of course, no May garden (or bedside) is quite complete without them. Supplied as crowns with long rhizomatous roots, each crown will have a 'pip' or growing point.

Planting in the garden Convallaria pips can be tricky to establish directly in the ground and are best started off in pots under cover before planting out in mid-May. When you are ready to plant them out choose a spot in light shade with moist soil and plenty of organic matter added in. The long thin rhizomes should be laid out horizontally, just under the surface of the soil 5-7cm deep. Space them about 20cm (8in) apart. Water them in well and give them a mulch of leaf mould or good garden compost.

In pots and containers Gently tease apart each crown and soak for half an hour if they seem dry. Use a loam-based compost with extra grit added, $\frac{2}{3}$ compost, $\frac{1}{3}$ grit. Plant each crown in a 7-8cm pot ensuring the shoot is visible just above the surface. Place in a cool greenhouse. Keep well-watered, they will be ready to plant out when the roots have spread to fill the pot.

Care and maintenance After the leaves have died down, give each plant a mulch of leaf mould in the autumn. After three to four years you can divide the clumps and replant to spread them into other parts of the garden.



Dahlia

Height: 60-120cm (24-47in)

Dahlias are one of the lowest maintenance, highest production cut flowers and garden plants you can grow. In a good year, they'll flower from late June to early December (particularly in a sheltered spot). They come in all shapes and sizes, and are available in most of the best flower colours. These are some of my favourite ever garden plants.

What to do with them when they arrive Dahlias are tender tubers. Their root structures look like a bunch of salamis gathered together on a stem. If you plant them out before the frosts are over, they may get frosted and die, so pot them up in March or early April, in a generous (at least 2 litre) pot filled with multi-purpose potting compost. Place them in a light, frost-free place and keep the compost moist. They will have formed bushy plants by the time the frosts have ended and will be in flower by the beginning of July. If you don't have anywhere to grow potted tubers, put them straight into the ground when the frosts are nearly over, mulching them or protecting them with a cloche or protective horticultural fleece if the foliage appears before the frosts have finished. This system involves less work, but you'll have plants several weeks behind those brought on inside.

Pinching out Whether you have raised your dahlias outside in the garden or under cover, you need to pinch out the tips of the main shoot as they grow. Either with a sharp knife or squeezed between your thumb and forefinger, remove the main shoot down to the top pair of leaves.

You also need to remove all but five shoots sprouting from the tuber. There may be several more shoots, some of them weedy, but all but five must go. It feels brutal, but pinching out encourages

bushy plants and with only five stems allowed to develop, you will get strong, vigorous growth that will produce lots of flowers.

Rooting cuttings Turn one tuber into 10. Both the pinched-out tips and the shoots from the main tuber can be used as cuttings to make more plants. Reduce the cuttings to about 5-6cm (2in) tall and remove all but the top pair of leaves. Insert them into a gritty mix of compost, all the way round the edge of a pot, spaced so that they are not touching. Water and cover the whole thing with a plastic bag supported on short canes round the edge of the pot and secured with a rubber band. Put the pot in a propagator on capillary matting (to reduce the need for watering) and leave for three to four weeks. They should then have rooted and will need potting up individually. When the frosts are over, these can also be planted out in the garden and, by mid summer, you'll hardly know mother from daughter.

Planting in the garden Dahlias thrive in most sunny situations and do best in a fertile soil, with moisture and good drainage. To plant them, dig a hole at least 15cm (6in) square and 15cm (6in) deep for each one, spacing them 75cm (30in) apart (depending on expected final size of variety) and ensure there is 5-10cm (2-4in) of soil above the tuber. Cover the base of the hole with compost or manure and give it a good dousing with a full watering can, then plant the dahlia. Add grit to the planting hole on heavy clay. You will need a stout stake, not just a bamboo cane, to support each plant and it is a good idea to knock this in first and then place the plant by its side.

Feeding and watering After about a week in the ground, scatter a couple of trowelfuls of GroChar fertiliser around the clump and give them another good soaking. Once a fortnight, feed them with a liquid balanced feed like Powerfeed Organic Fertiliser (see our website for details). In a drought, it's a good idea to water them once a week, with a good flood not a gentle sprinkle.

Staking With the stake in place at planting, tie them in every couple of weeks. Dahlias grow very quickly once they get going and can easily break off right at the base in wind or rain if they are not securely staked.

Deadheading If you don't pick every flower for the house, it's a good idea to have an occasional blitz of deadheading. This will make them look much better and prolong flowering. Cut heads off, removing the whole dead flowering stem.

Digging them up - or not? In recent years, our winters in the South of England have been so mild that dahlias left in the ground, mulched deeply to protect them from the frost, have re-emerged fine, bulking up and flowering well before the other plants grown on in pots. You could opt for this low-maintenance regime, but you risk losing your plants if we are hit by a hard winter. To replace them is cheap and easy, so this is what we do at Perch Hill, saving lots of time and hassle in the autumn and again in the spring.

To be sure of conserving your plants for next year, dig them up after the tops have been frosted once or twice in the autumn. Cut them down to 15cm (6in) before you do so. Knock off the surplus soil and, with a small piece of stick, scoop out the loose soil between the tubers - but leave enough to hold

'Blue Bayou'



them in place. Do not clean the tubers under a tap; to get water on a tuber at this time of year often spells disaster. Let them dry, hanging upside down from a dried stalk, leaving them there for a couple of weeks, then pack them away in a storage box in moist compost or sand. This prevents the tubers drying out. Store them in a cool, frost-free place – a garage or shed is ideal.

Pests and diseases Earwigs can be a problem with dahlias, eating the flowers and the leaves. The organic way of control is to position pots filled with straw upside-down raised on canes dotted throughout your dahlias. The earwigs crawl into the straw in the heat of the day. At the end of the day you can bag them, burn them or release them somewhere else far from your dahlias. Slugs also love dahlias, especially when they first shoot, so protect them from the outset with Wool Pellets (see our website), creating a slug repelling barrier.



Eucomis Pineapple Flower

Height: 50cm (20in)

There are few more magnificent bulbs for your summer and autumn garden than eucomis. They look almost as good in seed as they do in full flower and so hold their own in the garden for a good three-month stretch.

Planting in the garden Dry bulbs are best started off in pots, then planted in the border once they are in active growth. Once they're up and going, plant each bulb 30cm (12in) apart, at a depth of 15-25cm (6-10in). They prefer a warm, sunny aspect – and can take a while to get going until soil temperatures increase. Generally those plants in full sun will produce more flowers as a result – with fertile soil and plenty of water.

Cover the base of the planting hole with a few handfuls of grit until the hole is around 15cm (6in) deep. Then plant the bulb directly on the grit before backfilling with a mixture of soil and composted bark, with a sprinkling of general-purpose organic food.

In pots and containers Eucomis make superb feature plants in containers. Plant three bulbs into a pot 30cm (12in) across.



Use a loam-based compost with extra grit added, $\frac{2}{3}$ compost, $\frac{1}{3}$ grit, making sure you have a pot big enough to allow them to be planted at least 15cm (6in) deep. You'll need to water when they're growing at full tilt, best done in the evening. Container-grown plants are best overwintered in a dry and frost-free environment.

Care and maintenance Eucomis are generally hardy down to around -6°C in well-drained conditions. Plants in the border will require little watering. Feed with an organic fertiliser, like Powerfeed Organic Fertiliser (see our website for details), in early spring and occasionally add a weak comfrey liquid feed made from Comfrey Pellets (see sarahraven.com) when watering in summer. They may require supporting. In late autumn, apply a thick mulch of bark over the plant. Old leaves and flower stems should be removed only once they turn yellow.

Eucomis are generally pest-free. Watch out for slugs as new leaves emerge which may not be till May.

Freesia

Height: up to 40cm (16in)

I adore freesias – I love the scent, the arching stems and that, either growing or cut, each stem lasts for nearly three weeks, looking and smelling delicious. These new varieties have been bred especially and heat and cold-treated so they flower brilliantly in the garden. They are best planted soon after you receive them; they can be a washout if you start with corms that have been sitting around too long in their bag, so that all life's juices have been drawn out of them. Plant them in March (in a greenhouse) or outside in April but only after all risk of frost has passed. Planting later than mid-May is not recommended as temperatures may be too high.

Planting in the garden Plant the corms straight into the ground 5cm (2in) deep and 5-8cm (2-3in) apart in a well-drained spot in sun or light shade with some twigggy sticks for support. I grew some very successfully last summer and autumn in a west-facing bed against a hedge. When the plants are up and growing, they will benefit from a potash-rich liquid feed which you can make yourself using comfrey leaves or pellets (see our website).

In pots and containers Plant six bulbs, pointy end upwards, in a 13cm (5in) pot, with a cane support added on planting to keep the foliage and flowering stems upright as they grow. Use a loam-based compost with extra grit added, $\frac{2}{3}$ compost, $\frac{1}{3}$ grit. Water regularly and keep them moist and shaded at all times – a cold greenhouse or conservatory is ideal. Once the corms start to sprout, move the pots into full sunlight and keep watering. When the buds show colour, you can bring them indoors.

Care and maintenance If planted in good soil or compost, they will not require feeding. Flowering takes around 100-120 days from planting. These are not fully hardy, so lift the plants in the autumn either when the plants yellow or after the first frost. Cut the stems back to 2cm (1in) and allow the corms to dry. Remove the old, shrivelled portion, keeping only the new plump corms. These store easily in vermiculite or sand. Store them in a cool, dry, frost-free place. Plant directly, when the ground begins to warm. Stagger plantings to extend the season of bloom.



Galtonia candicans 'viridiflora' Green Berg Lily

Height: 1m (3ft 3in)

Towering, ethereal ivory-green spires from summer into autumn and totally perennial. These bulbs give incredible value over years, with bulbs producing at least two very long-lasting splendid towers, coming up year after year. They look fantastic planted en masse in drifts in a sunny border and are equally lovely in a vase where their delicate fragrance can be enjoyed indoors.

Planting in the garden Plant bulbs from March-April 10cm (4in) apart and 8cm (3in) deep. Galtonias dislike winter wet but also need to be kept moist during the growing season so incorporate plenty of well-rotted manure, leaf mould or garden compost when planting and add some grit to the planting hole if your soil is heavy.

In pots and containers For earlier blooms, pot them up in a cool greenhouse where it is a showstopper as a centre-piece in a large container.

Care and maintenance Mulch well in autumn, in cooler regions lift them like gladioli to overwinter, or grow in containers which you can move indoors in autumn. If slugs are a problem, protect plants using wool pellets or nematodes. Avoid moving plants once established as they do not like being disturbed but if you wish to propagate, lift in late autumn and remove the small offsets from the mother bulb for potting on.



Gloriosa 'Rothschildiana' Glory Lily

Height: 1.5-2.5m (4ft 11in-8ft 2in)

For extraordinary exotic pots for a sunny corner, porch or conservatory, you just can't beat the Glory Lily. Beloved flower of artists for centuries, this is a total one off.

In pots and containers Plant three or four tubers into a 20cm (8in) diameter pot from mid to late spring. Plant tubers with the shoot facing upwards 8-10cm (3-4in) deep using a peat-free multi-purpose compost with plenty of grit added in. If shoots are not visible you can plant tubers horizontally in trays until shoots appear and then transplant into pots. Place somewhere bright and warm, a heated greenhouse or conservatory is ideal. Keep the compost moist and provide support – canes or a trellis to a height of around 1.2m – you will need to tie in stems as they grow.

Care and maintenance Keep well-watered and feed fortnightly with a balanced liquid feed. Lift and store tubers to overwinter somewhere dry and frost-free, plant again the following spring. Caution: All parts of this lily are highly toxic if ingested.



Gladiolus

Height: 1.2m (47in)

All gladioli are easy to grow. On rich but well-drained soils, you can plant them straight out in the garden. On my heavy clay, particularly in a wet spring, I tend to plant my glads in pots and put them out in a clump already growing.

Planting in the garden Plant as soon as the soil has warmed up a bit, in mid to late April or early May, in fertile, well-drained soil in full sun. Plant the corms 10cm (4in) apart and 10-15cm (4-6in) deep. Secured deep in the ground, you are less likely to need a stake. Gladioli need plenty of water to flower well, so if you can, dig a trench and pile in well-rotted manure at the base before planting. This will help feed the bulbs and will also retain water to ensure a more regular supply. If you have bought quite a few, don't plant them all at once. Plant 15 corms every couple of weeks from early May to July to give a succession of flowers through the summer and autumn.

Planting in pots Plant five corms in a 15cm (6in) pot at 20cm (8in) deep, so a bit more closely packed than recommended above. Put them somewhere bright and cold, but frost-free, and water. Wait for them to shoot and plant them out in the garden from May onwards, by which time you'll have well-established plants. They will need staking. To avoid piercing the corms, canes are safest poked in before you plant the bulbs.

Care and maintenance On well-drained, poorer soil, extra watering will be required. Apply a high-potash feed, like Powerfeed Organic Fertiliser (see our website) every two weeks as soon as the flower spikes are 15cm (6in) high and until at least three weeks after flowering. This is essential on poor soils as flowering can diminish in successive seasons. Gladioli will flower three months after planting.

Lift or not lift It is best to grow them in a sheltered spot and mulch them deeply, or to lift them for the winter. This should be done when the leaves turn yellow/brown; snap the corms from the stems, dust with sulphur or dip in fungicide, dry for two weeks then snap the new corms from the old and discard the old corms. They must be kept cold (frost-free) and dry until replanting.

Dividing You can dig and divide the clumps every few years. Without this, the new cormlets forming will invade the space of the original corm and the nutrients will have to be shared. The danger of this is the creation of lots of foliage and no flower spikes.



Hesperantha

Height: 45cm (18in)

These are South African plants, which grow on stream banks and damp meadows and flower late – in September and October, making them invaluable for autumn colour and cut flowers. The sword-shaped leaves are almost evergreen.

Planting in the garden They are happiest in damp, rich, but well-drained soil in full sun or light shade. They hate to really dry out, so putting them on the margin of a pond, or with lots of organic matter added to a thin soil is key. Plant the rhizomes 5cm (2in) deep and 10cm (4in) apart. The small rhizome produces stolons and the plants spread quite rapidly into big patches, up to 90cm (36in) across. They are fully hardy.

Planting in pots Plant in a moisture retentive compost and do not allow to dry out.

Care and maintenance This loves plenty of water during the summer.



Lily

Height: 60-120cm (24-48in)

Lilies can be planted at any time during the autumn, winter or early spring. As long as they are in by the end of March, they will be fine. On very heavy soils, March planting is better.

Planting in the garden All our lilies are reliably perennial – reappearing year after year – so bear this in mind when you choose where to plant them. If possible, find them a spot in sun or light shade (most colours stay better with some shade, particularly the pinks) where they won't be disturbed. Plant them pointy end up. Don't worry if the bulbs have a sprout. Plant them with the sprout just above ground and, even if it is bent, it will right itself in three to four weeks.

I always plant lily bulbs in clumps of at least three to five. Without these numbers, you get a very dotted effect. Dig a hole for each group at least 20cm (8in) deep. I dig out a trench or shallow hole, taking up as much space as I have room for between other plants. It's just one big hole dug at the same time, rather than lots of mini cores. Spread a 5cm (2in) layer of grit all over the bottom – drainage is the most important thing. All lilies flower better and live longer if the soil is not cold and clammy, with feet in the shade, flowers in the sun. Mark clearly wherever you plant a lily bulb so you don't later slice through it, and protect against slugs.

In pots and containers On heavy, clay soils, the best way to grow lilies is in pots, either ornamental or black plastic ones which you can drop into borders where you want extra flowers. Plant the bulbs using a loam-based compost, mixed with grit, $\frac{2}{3}$ compost, $\frac{1}{3}$ grit. They like to be fed while they're growing. Ideally give a liquid comfrey feed made from comfrey pellets (see our website) every two weeks as well as a top dressing of Orgrow Concentrated Manure.

Care and maintenance The main current issue with lilies is lily beetle. These are scarlet, easy to see, small beetles which munch away on the lilies' foliage and flowers through the spring. Squash them whenever you see them (particularly in April and May when they are at their most active) or use a systemic insecticide.



Nerine bowdenii

Height: 45-60cm (18-24in)

A brilliant pink, autumn-flowering bulb, which will flower for years once it has settled in.

Planting in the garden Plant your bulbs as soon as they arrive, each one into a 9cm (3½in) pot filled with a mixture of 50% multi-purpose compost and 50% loam-based potting compost, such as John Innes No 2. When planting, make sure that the roots are spread out and only the bottom half of the bulb is below the compost level – the top half of the bulb must remain above it. Wait until the roots fill the pot before planting out into the garden, at the same level. They do best in a well-drained site with full sun and love it at the base of a sunny, south-facing wall. A good summer baking encourages plenty of flowers in autumn. Water them in well.

In pots and containers Nerines do well in pots permanently. Use the same compost mix as above, planting so the tips of the bulbs show above the compost surface. Bring them inside when in flower for brilliant and long-lasting houseplants, moving them outside again when they've gone over.

Care and maintenance In cold areas, mulch clumps when they've finished flowering for winter protection. If you think the flowers are getting less, year on year, feed in summer with a potash-rich fertiliser such as comfrey pellets.

Nerines hate disturbance, so once planted try to avoid moving them. After planting, the bulbs should grow some strap-shaped leaves until mid-summer, and then die down. If we have a wet summer they may remain green. In September/October, flower spikes will emerge and bloom without the foliage. Avoid planting next to narcissi (daffodils).

If there are no blooms in the first autumn, don't worry, nerines are notoriously temperamental when they have been moved/replanted. They will flower the following year. After many years the bulbs will become congested, but do not divide them as they flower much better when grown like this.



Sparaxis

Height: 30cm (12in)

Planting in the garden Plant 7cm (2½in) apart and 7cm (2½in) deep in full sun and well-drained soil. Plant when there is no longer a risk of frosts. These are not as hardy as some bulbs so they need very good drainage and a generous mulch of compost to overwinter.

In pots and containers If you have severe frosts, they may be better grown in pots and beds in a cool greenhouse or conservatory.

Care and maintenance Remove foliage when the leaves have turned yellow and died back. Mulch in winter.



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